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FISH AND GAME IN ALBERTA

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BY

THE HON. N. E. TANNER
MINISTER OF LANDS AND MINES



Reservoir Ponds at Taghkanic, Chappaqua



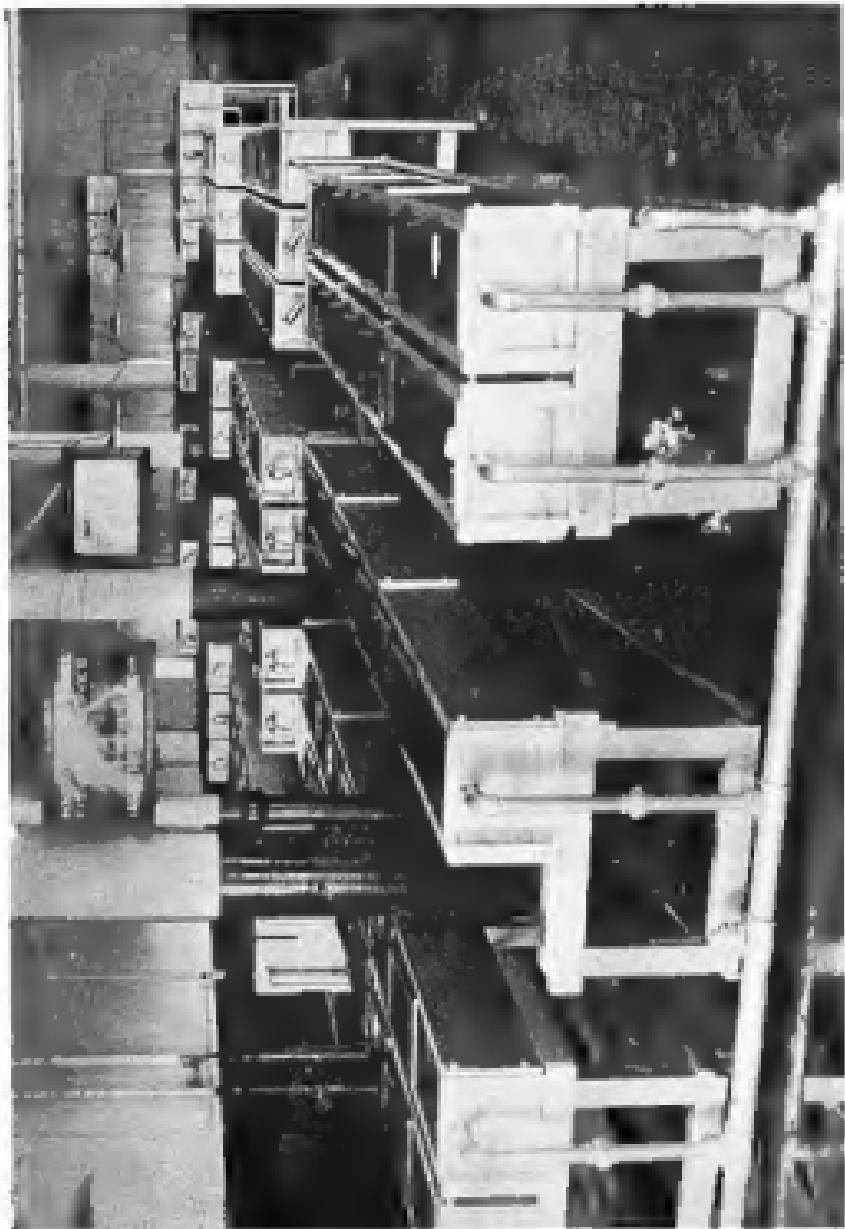
Fish and Game in Alberta

Not so many years ago, as time goes, fish and game provided the sole means of livelihood and the sole product of export for the peoples who lived in what is known now as Alberta. The fur trade was Alberta's number one industry. Indeed had it not been for the fact that the fur trade attracted our forefathers to the plains and foothills of this province, Alberta might still be an uncharted wilderness. Today we are apt to regard the wild life of our province as a source of sport alone for a privileged few, but, my friends, while we are laying grand plans for conservation of our agricultural lands and our forests; while legislators and engineers are scratching their heads and wrestling with the problem of preserving our timber lands and our pastures; while high finance is budding new ideas for the floating of debt-laden, interest-bearing bonds to finance extensive schemes of conservation for the future, the humble little beaver is doing more right now, without money, without hope of reward and without any interest in politics, to save our fields and our forests than all the engineers of the past have ever done.

I am sure my point is clear to you. It is simply this, that the wild life, with which we are so abundantly blessed in Alberta, is a most valuable asset. It is an asset which must be carefully protected and about which the taxpayers in particular and the public generally should be fully informed.

Every denizen of the forests and fields; every bird that takes wing over our prairies, foothills and mountains; every fish that races the rapids of our streams or brooks or seeks the cool stillness of our under-water caverns is the property of the Crown. Each is the property, therefore, of the people of the Province of Alberta and, as the servants of the people of this province, it is one of the principal duties of the Government of this province to protect and encourage perpetuation of our wild life in all of its forms.

I mentioned the beaver a moment ago. We know very well the part which this industrious little animal plays in that economy which we associate with conservation. It may be difficult for us, always, to imagine what exact place each species of wild life may hold in some similar economy and even were we able to



do so, such a discourse would be too long for a talk of this kind, and it would depart too far from the purpose of this broadcast which is to report to you on the functions of your present Government in administering fish and game affairs in Alberta.

However, a moment of consideration to the work of the beaver will interest you. The beaver is the greatest natural conservationist known to man. By building dams across our rivers and streams, he conserves the run-off from our mountains and hills and holds back water which would otherwise rush down to the sea in flood time. He thus raises the water levels and ensures that there will be deep pools in which the fish may live through the heat of summer and the severe cold of winter. By damming streams which might run dry; by holding water in them, the beaver creates natural fire guards which protect our forests from destruction and by protecting the forests he also protects other wild life which might perish in flames or starve to death from the destruction of their pastures and what is to them their home and their fortress. Because the beaver is a staunch friend of man, he has been given excellent protection. Although he is the most valuable of fur bearing animals he has been placed on the protected list this year. No beaver may be taken except in special cases where this animal is doing unwarranted damage to buildings, stock or crops.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, your Government does not just sit down and make laws regarding these matters in a sort of willy-nilly fashion. We always try to seek the advice and assistance of men who know the habits of animals, birds and fish and who can help us in shaping our regulations to the best interests of all concerned—including the wild life itself.

For this reason we have established close contact with the sportsman, the fur farmer and the fur dealer. We have established advisory committees to assist the Department in administration and in formulating our regulations. The sportsmen and the trained biologist are both represented on these committees, one of which deals with fish and the other with game. In addition to these committees the fur farmers and the fur dealers through their provincial organizations, have appointed representatives to speak for them and work with members of the Department staff in many phases of their activities.

You can see, therefore, that there is a very important place for proper regulations, and you understand also that these regulations are not set arbitrarily. They are the result of careful study and deliberation by members of the Department staff in consultation with men of very wide and practical experience, and men of technical training.

If we are to preserve wild life we have to protect it against its enemies—other animals which prey upon it; animals like cougars, wolves, coyotes, and so forth. So we offer bounties for the skins of these animals. We pay a \$15.00 bounty on the pelt of a cougar; \$10.00 on the pelt of a wolf, and during a specified time of the year there is a \$5.00 bounty on the pelt of a coyote. We also pay bounties on birds which prey upon other birds. These bounties on crows and magpies are administered through the Fish and Game Associations, and this year your Government made grants of \$2,000.00 to the Associations for this purpose.

As you possibly know, we give added protection to wild life by setting up preserves and sanctuaries in which all hunting and trapping is prohibited. We also protect wild life by limiting the number of birds or animals which may be taken by hunters during a season. These are known as bag and season limits and a system of licensing has been devised for guides and outfitters to ensure that hunters will be given established standards of services when such guides or outfitters are engaged to take them into the hunting grounds.

The system of licensing which has been devised for trappers in the fur bearing regions of the province ensure that trappers on registered trap lines, of which there are at present over 1,500, may have continued use of their own areas. A trapper may preserve the breeding stock along his own trap lines or even import animals, so that if he takes proper care of his region he may take a good crop of furs from it year after year for many seasons. This system leads not only to the conservation of fur but also to the conservation of big game, game birds, forest cover and fish.

The regulations which apply to fur dealers ensure, in turn, that the trappers will receive a fair return for their furs and also that the proper returns are made to the Department to assist in the administration of matters pertaining to game and fur.

The administration of fisheries in Alberta comes under the Dominion Fisheries Act because all of our principal river systems cross provincial boundaries, but here in Alberta we have taken steps to assure that fishing will continue to be good. We take considerable pride in the fact that we lead other provinces in the efficiency of our equipment for restocking lakes and streams with fingerlings. The old method used to be to put fish fry or newly hatched fish into lakes and streams, but experience has proven that it pays to rear the fish to the fingerling stage.

At Calgary at present we have a fish hatchery which is the largest single unit in Canada, and to go hand in hand with the hatcheries we have established rearing ponds at various places throughout the province for the purpose of raising fingerlings. More rearing ponds are being built, and this policy will continue as rapidly as possible.

For many years eggs for the propagation of sport fish in this province have been purchased from the United States. During the past two years the Department has been carrying on spawning operations at Kananaskis Lake and at Cold Lake to secure as much of our requirements as possible of the sport fish species in these lakes. Continuing this policy, arrangements are now being made for the setting up of brood stock of every species in ponds where spawning operations can be carried on with a minimum of expense and a maximum of success. These ponds are situated close to gravelled highways and the eggs may be taken to the hatchery without the risk which is always entailed in the shipping of eggs over long distances. The cost of these operations will be smaller than the cost of eggs purchased from outside the province, and the money saved in this way can be used to further the propagation and distribution of fingerlings throughout the province.

To assist the natural stocking of lakes with commercial fish, a whitefish hatchery, with a capacity of more than one hundred million eggs, is operating on the southern shore of Lesser Slave Lake.

We are rather severely handicapped in our fishery work by the shortage of experienced men, but, despite this fact, we are following a policy of systematically studying our lakes and streams along biological lines in order that we may find out what fish thrive most readily in various waters and districts. This will enable us to make a better selection of the best species of fish to place in our lakes and streams.

It should be of interest to many of you to learn that Alberta's lakes supply a considerable quantity of fish for the commercial markets as far distant as Chicago and New York. In this connection I may say that the problem of the infestation of commercial fish is being closely watched by a trained biologist.

In closing, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to touch briefly upon some very interesting facts which may come as a surprise to many of you. There are now 1,146 licensed fur farms in Alberta, the second highest of all the provinces in Canada. These farms are raising all kinds of fur bearing ani-

males. A total of 26,411 of these animals were kept for breeding purposes during the present season of 1943 and they were valued at more than \$524,000.00.

Alberta, which is one of the two leading provinces in fur production, produced, for the year ending June 30th, 1943, fur valued at more than \$5,000,000. The production of mink topped the list with a total value of more than \$1,700,000 and the little squirrel alone brought a half million dollars revenue during the past year.

I will not bore you with any more figures, but I am sure that you will agree with me that these few totals give a good indication of the growing importance of our fur farming industry, and, in fact, of our whole fur trading business.

You know, ladies and gentlemen, fur buyers representing all the largest and most influential markets of the world come to Alberta to buy furs even now during war time. We have been aware of the importance of this industry as an export feature in our economy, and by maintaining high standards and grades during war time, by never ceasing to be vigilant in the matter of conservation and in the encouragement of proper breeding and rearing methods now we are laying a solid foundation for a marked expansion which we expect after the war.

I may mention also that we have effected a very proficient measure of economy in the administration of our fish and game regulations. In 1941 the administration of fish and game was placed under the Department of Lands and Mines. It was thus possible to increase the number of enforcement officers by using the personnel of the forest service. In other words, we had a number of forest rangers already on duty in our forested areas, and by using them as fish and game wardens we were able to improve this service by the addition of 110 men, who already had their administration offices throughout the eastern slope of the Rockies and in the northern sections of the province.

Thus ends my report to you on the administration of matters pertaining to fish and game in Alberta. It is unnecessary, I know, to ask you to do your best as loyal and patriotic citizens to help us to maintain our laws, and to conserve, by every reasonable means, our wild life which means so much to us.